

# Common Lilac



# Common Lilac (*Syringa vulgaris*)

## General Description

A medium to large hardy shrub with stout, spreading branches developing a somewhat oval to irregularly rounded crown. Spreads by suckering. Showy, fragrant flowers.

### Leaves and Buds

Bud Arrangement - Opposite.

Bud Color - Green to brownish-purple with 3 pairs of scales.

Bud Size - Sessile, subglobose, large, 1/4 to 1/2 inch.

Leaf Type and Shape - Simple, cordate.

Leaf Margins - Entire, smooth.

Leaf Surface - Smooth, leathery.

Leaf Length - 2 to 5 inches.

Leaf Width - 1½ to 3½ inches.

Leaf Color - Dark green.

### Flowers and Fruits

Flower Type - Perfect, fragrant, borne in large terminal panicles, singles and doubles.

Flower Color - White to purple, a variety of colors.

Fruit Type - Woody capsule. Flat tannish seeds.

Fruit Color - Smooth, brown.

### Form

Growth Habit - Upright leggy shrub with irregular outline.

Texture - Medium-coarse, summer; medium-coarse, winter.

Crown Height - 8 to 12 feet.

Crown Width - 6 to 12 feet.

Bark Color - Young bark is green-brown, older bark is gray-brown.

Root System - Shallow, dense.

## Environmental Requirements

### Soils

Soil Texture - Adapted to a wide variety of soils.

Soil pH - pH is 5.5 to 8.0.

Windbreak Suitability Group - 1, 1K, 3, 4, 4C, 5, 6D, 6G, 7, 8, 9C, 9L.

### Cold Hardiness

USDA Zone 2.

### Water

Drought tolerant, does not withstand ponding.

### Light

Full sun.

## Uses

### Conservation/Windbreaks

Medium to tall shrub for farmstead windbreaks and highway beautification. Occasionally used in field windbreaks.

### Wildlife

Little value for fruit or browse. May be of value for nesting by songbirds.

### Agroforestry Products

Floral design - Fragrant cutflowers.

### Urban/Recreational

Good for shelter, shrub borders, massing in parks, and screen plantings.

## Cultivated Varieties

Hundreds of cultivars/clones of varying flower types and colors.

## Related Species

Chinese Lilac (*Syringa x chinensis*) - Excellent lavender flowers, merits use in farmstead windbreaks, 5 to 7 feet hedges or screens, or specimen shrub.

Late Lilac (*S. villosa*)

Miss Kim Lilac (*S. patula* 'Miss Kim') - Very dense, rounded form, pink flowers, slow-growing to 10 to 12 feet.

Palibin Dwarf Lilac (*S. meyeri* 'Palibin') (syn. Korean Dwarf Lilac) - Similar to Miss Kim but grows 6 to 7½ feet tall.

## Pests

Common diseases include powdery mildew. Common lilac is a host of ash yellows, but the impact is not known. Common insect pests include lilac borer. Extracts from *Syringa* species are toxic to insect pests.

## LILAC

### *Syringa vulgaris* L.

Plant Symbol = SYVU

Contributed by: USDA NRCS National Plant Data Center



Conservation Trees & Shrubs for Montana  
USDA, NRCS, Montana State Office

**Alternative Name**  
common lilac

#### Uses

*Economic:* A green dye is obtained from the flowers and the leaves and a yellow-orange dye is obtained from the twigs (Grae 1974). An essential oil is obtained from the flowers and used in perfume fragrances.

*Ethnobotanic:* The bark and leaves has been chewed as a treatment for sore mouth (Moerman 1998).

#### Status

Please consult the Plants Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status, such as, state noxious status and wetland indicator values.

#### Description

*General:* Olive Family (Oleaceae). Lilac is an introduced, perennial, deciduous shrub that grows between twelve to sixteen feet tall. The leaves are simple, ovate to broadly ovate, and five to twelve

centimeters long. The flowers are mostly white, lilac, or purple, pleasantly fragrant in long terminal panicles (Copperrider 1995). The fruiting capsules are one to 1.5 centimeters long, with flat winged seeds (Bruggen 1976).

*Distribution:* Common lilac is native of Europe, introduced and naturalized in the United States, escapes from cultivation from New York to North Dakota, south to Georgia and Kansas (Steyermark 1963). For current distribution, please consult the Plant profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

#### Adaptation

Lilac is easily grown on most soil types but prefers neutral to slightly acid soil. This species does not tolerate poorly drained soils. It performs best in a warm sunny position.

#### Establishment

*Propagation by Seed:* Lilac seeds should be sown in March, or as soon as they are ripe, in a cold frame. The seeds should be pre-treated for four weeks of warm stratification and then three weeks cold stratification to improve germination. Place the seedlings into individual pots when they are large enough to handle. If sufficient growth is made by the summer it is possible to out-plant otherwise grow seedlings in a cold frame for the first winter and out-plant in late spring the next year.

#### Management

Common lilac should be planted in areas with good air circulation to reduce problems with powdery mildew. The first year after planting, *Syringa vulgaris* will probably not produce many, if any blooms; only after it has adapted itself to its new surroundings will it begin to produce flower clusters with vigor. Pruning should be done yearly to maintain desired height and improve form.

#### Cultivars, Improved and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

Commonly available through commercial nurseries. Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service) office for more information. Look in the phone book under "United States Government." The Natural Resources Conservation Service will be listed under the subheading "Department of Agriculture."

Plant Materials <<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/>>

Plant Fact Sheet/Guide Coordination Page <<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/pfs.html>>

National Plant Data Center <<http://npdc.usda.gov>>

## References

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<[www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/pas/forestry/lilac.html](http://www.mt.nrcs.usda.gov/pas/forestry/lilac.html)>

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site<<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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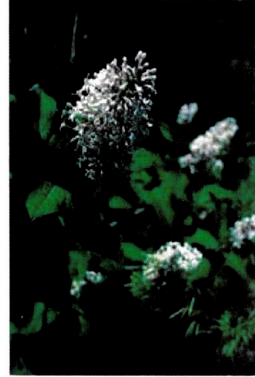
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## Lilac

*Syringa* spp.

*var. villosa lilac*



*common lilac*



**Growth Form:** round to irregular

**Crown Density:** dense

**Size:** 8-12 feet high

8-12 foot spread

**Drought Resistance:** very good

**Cold Hardiness:** excellent

**Growth Rate:** rapid

**Life Span:** moderate

**Elevational Range:** to 8,000 feet

**Soil Conditions:** good alkaline tolerance

**Possible Insect Problems:** lilac borer, leaf miners, oyster shell scale

**Possible Disease Problems:** lilac leaf blotch, powdery mildew, some leaf spots

**Wildlife Value:** moderately high: songbirds; cover value

**Seasonal Color:** fragrant purple or white spring flowers

**Miscellany:** develops into a dense barrier

Taken from: Trees for Conservation, a buyer's guide, Colorado State Forest Service